

## Orbita

*"It is because simplicity and vastness are both beautiful that we seek by preference simple facts and vast facts; that we take delight, now in following the giant courses of the stars, now in scrutinizing the microscope that prodigious smallness which is also a vastness, and now in seeking in geological ages the traces of a past that attracts us because of its remoteness."*

Henry Poincaré

Between 1887 and 1890 the mathematician Henry Poincaré, working on the problem of the stability of the orbits of three celestial bodies subject to mutual gravitational attraction, discovered that simple dynamic systems can have extremely complicated explanations which are neither periodical, nor quasi-periodical, nor inclined towards a fixed point. These explanations are known as *chaotic solutions* and their implications today underlie much scientific speculation on the movement of celestial bodies. The link between simple dynamic systems and the complexity of the explanations and hypotheses of their development is a suggestion that lends itself well to an attempt to access *Orbita* (2005) by Grönlund/Nisunen: a work that is so deceptively simple in its structure, and yet is capable of leading us to sensations and motivations of fundamental significance, on which the multiplicity of our being is based and through which a particular and unusual sense of beauty is considered.

It is not by chance that I quote Poincaré: it was him who asserted in fact, in the celebrated Conjecture that bears his name, that the sphere is the simplest body in which a closed line can be constricted until it becomes a point. And it is precisely a sphere, the element that ideally synthesizes the geometric convergence and near implosion of dimensions, on which *Orbita* is based. Nothing more than a large steel sphere that rotates continually on a circular course which rhythmically contracts and expands by means of pneumatic cylinders, the sound of the attrition between the two bodies amplified and reproduced in space in real time. Nothing more, and yet a title like *Orbita* implies vastness: one immediately contemplates references to the structure and laws that regulate the planets, and to an idea of circularity linked to systems and flows that act on our rhythms in an invisible but constant way.

By definition, an orbit is the trajectory of one body's movement around another body. But what does the steel sphere in the Grönlund/Nisunen installation orbit around? Here there is no tangible center; or rather, it seems that a center is given *in absentia*. A slight sense of unease besets us, a destabilization that will not surprise those who already know the vague sense of incompleteness that has always pervaded the two Finns' work, suffusing it with melancholy that suggests an unspoken solitude. They entitle an installation *Orbita*, construct its outline and underline it with the movement of the sphere, only to then leave the center empty: here Grönlund/Nisunen prove to be dealing with some of the main issues in contemporary artistic creation, in a time in which entire iconographic systems are based on negligible aspects of existence and the most avant-garde musicians embark on explorations at the very limit of sound based on error and absence. The circular formal model proposed by Grönlund/Nisunen's constructed outline, rather than ideally leading us to the controlled and comforting centripetal finalism of the labyrinth of Chartres cathedral, seems to shift and turn attention to the perimeter of the circle as border, groove and threshold. The threshold (de)limits and at the same time suggests expansion, *interminable spaces*... The uninterrupted movement of the sphere indicates a continual fulfillment and a continual degeneration of an idea of fixed form. Grönlund/Nisunen lead us to the edge of a abyss from which we observe the vastness of an introspective vertigo. The final result reflects the way in which the two artists work, creating their installations without ever knowing exactly what will happen up until the moment of set-up in situ.

In which other way, then, can we relate to this orbit without a tangible center? One possible approach to the installation is offered by the presence of sound, a mirror and a transfiguration of the movement of the sphere, the passage of which is amplified by attached microphones. The screeching along the tracks and the continuous flow are reflected in a sound that is never abstracted or filtered, but raw and immediate, live and direct from the phenomenon itself. Coagulated on the material from which it was generated. A buzzing and screeching that is disconnected from narrative or merely commentary functions, and that echoes in the surrounding spaces, filling them up. Here the sound turns upon itself and its existence is a fundamental part of the work; it is a living, spatial presence and refers to an almost essential idea, an *imago* that contains its most profound meaning. And cuts through the space: let us not forget that Grönlund/Nisunen are architects by education. And far from creating cold or aestheticizing constructions, they produce a mechanism that delves into the reality of a kinetic phenomenon, embedding and reflecting its prime modalities.

And continuing on the subject of sound, one can't help here thinking of the form of the *locked groove*: a simple formal intervention on the surface of a vinyl disc that allows a groove to turn back upon itself ad infinitum, thus interrupting the concept of linearity and temporal delimitation implicit in the spiral form of the disc, questioning its centripetal finality and instead suggesting infinity, permanence, sculptural solidity, being as object. Furthermore, phase shifting with respect to the linearity of a sound reproduced in a space had already been explored by the two artists in *Music Box*, an installation presented in 2004 in the group exhibition *Berlin North* at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. A completely dark, acoustically isolated environment in which one became bewildered in the attempt to follow a shifting sound distributed throughout the space in rotation. "*The music was the Internationale, reproduced by a mechanical music box slowed down to the point of becoming unrecognizable; in fact it seemed like a strange nursery rhyme. A microphone in each corner of a box was connected to a speaker in each of the four corners of an exterior room. The rotation of the sound changed the equilibrium of the signals coming from the four speakers. In choosing that particular melody and an antiquated sound recording technique, we wanted to create a melancholic and somehow unsettling atmosphere.*"

Thus, sound becomes the invisible abode of subtle disturbances. In *Orbita* as well, Grönlund/Nisunen conserve their taste for creating bewilderment; they offer us not a completed form(ula), but fluctuations thereof, modulations which the sonorous sphere helps to suggest and enact by means of its transitory quality. A perceptive twilight that goes beyond what is clearly delineated. After all, it is precisely on states of transition that the two artists concentrate in *Helsinki 21.5.2005*, the photographic series that accompanies *Orbita*: twenty-four photos taken in Hernesaari, an abandoned seaside area between a residential neighborhood and the port of Finland's capital. The steel sphere from *Orbita*, placed on the ground, with the camera and tripod above it, reflects the surrounding landscape. One shot every hour over the course of a day captures changes in light and the sun's circular trajectory in the sky, in an ideal link with the circular trajectory outlined in the installation. Here the hypnosis of circular movement is enhanced by the opening of a boundary.

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